

For Immediate Release

Robert Katz: The Five Books of Moses

On view September 18, 2016–January 5, 2017

Opening Reception and Artist's Talk: Sunday, Sept. 18, 1:30–3:00 p.m.

R.S.V.P. art@hebrewhome.org or 718.581.1330



Robert Katz, *Exodus*, from *The Five Books of Moses*, 2011, steel, cast plaster, cloth, and found objects, 28 x 20 x 20 inches each. Courtesy of the artist.

Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection at Hebrew Home at Riverdale is pleased to announce the exhibition *Robert Katz: The Five Books of Moses*, which will be on view from September 18, 2016–January 5, 2017. The exhibition consists of an installation of five mixed media assemblages inspired by the books of the Hebrew Bible. Please join us for the opening reception and artist's talk on Sunday, September 18, from 1:30-3 p.m. in the Derfner Judaica Museum located in the Jacob Reingold Pavilion at 5901 Palisade Avenue in the Riverdale neighborhood of the Bronx. This event is free and open to the public. Please R.S.V.P. to 718.581.1596 or art@hebrewhome.org.

According to Katz, the project was inspired by a request from his children to build a three-dimensional book that would illustrate the biblical text. Most recently, it was featured at a presentation he gave at the Center for Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Oxford University in England. It has also been presented at the Phillips Museum of Art at Franklin and Marshall College and at Nanjing University in China. Created in 2011, the sculpture was first installed at the Maine Jewish Museum in 2012.

Katz's welded assemblages owe something to his childhood memories of his father, an aircraft mechanic during World War II, using tools and fixing things. He has also vividly described the two of them sitting side by side in synagogue on hot, early autumn days, inhaling "his fragrance

of oil and grease," as they shared in Jewish observance, instilled and passed on from generation to generation. Over time those paternal influences combined with what Katz observed and learned from the work of such major 20th-century sculptors and early installation artists as Eva Hesse, Edward Kienholz, Jacques Lipchitz, Louise Nevelson, David Smith, and Robert Smithson. Each of these artists connected to their environment in a deeply subjective way, incorporating memory or elaborate fantasy, irony and social commentary, the quirky and uncanny into their art.

In *The Five Books of Moses*, Katz used found objects, his father's old tools, and other castoffs from a pile in his studio or steel yard in each of the separate assemblages titled after the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Each sculpture is filled with industrial detritus and other vestiges removed from their former utilitarian context. Still they provide a way into the text. Recognizable objects that are whole or mere fragments, smooth or coarse, durable or ephemeral, neutral or bright in color, contain allusions to the Bible's contents. The parts are welded and assembled on a steel plate above a cast plaster book opened to the corresponding title page; purple velvet fabric drapes across the supporting pedestal. In *Genesis*, Katz incorporated a manifold from the exhaust system of an old truck, which had brought to mind the Creation. In *Exodus*, a yellow fragment of molten bronze had suggested to him the golden calf and a square piece of marble and blue thread was used because it resembled the tabernacle, the desert sanctuary during the time of the Israelites' wanderings in the desert. Eschewing narrative, each assemblage reflects the artist's engagement with text and tradition, embodying deep meaning and memory. His process connects ancient words and stories with tokens and traces of his life.

continued



Robert Katz, *The Five Books of Moses*, 2011, installation: steel, cast plaster, cloth and found objects, 28 x 20 x 20 inches each. Courtesy of the artist.

About the artist

Robert Katz was born in 1950 and grew up in the Bronx and Brooklyn. He studied at the Brooklyn Museum Art School and received his undergraduate degree in studio art from New York University in 1972. In 1973, he traveled to Montana and settled near the banks of the Clark Fork and Bitterroot Rivers, establishing a studio in the shadow of the northern Rockies, where Native American culture shaped his artistic process. In 1975 he earned an MFA degree in sculpture from the University of Montana.

Katz is Professor of Art in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Maine at Augusta, where he has taught since 1981. He has also been on the art faculty at Southern Illinois University and Oberlin College. Influenced by an initial trip to Israel in 1987 and many more to Poland commencing in 1990, his art during the past 25 years has explored issues of Jewish identity, family remembrance, social memory, and the Holocaust, and he has participated in numerous conferences, panels, and seminars addressing the Holocaust and other genocides. For three summers in the 1990s he was artist-in-residence at Seeds of Peace International Camp creating large outdoor sculptures with Israeli and Arab youth.

In Maine, Katz has exhibited at the Barn Gallery in Ogunquit, the Danforth at the University of Maine in Augusta, Harlow Gallery in Hallowell, the Bowdoin College Museum of Art in Brunswick, Center for Maine Contemporary Art in Rockport, Viles Arboretum in Augusta, and the Michael Klahr Center, University of Maine at Augusta. He has also been commissioned to create Maine Percent for Art projects in the communities of Auburn, Benton, and Waldoboro. His multimedia installation *Were the House Still Standing: Maine Survivors and Liberators Remember the Holocaust* is a permanent installation at the Michael Klahr Center.

Nationally, his sculptures, drawings, and installation projects have been exhibited in numerous one person and group exhibitions at museums and galleries, including the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut; Hundred Acres Gallery, New York City; the Art Academy of Cincinnati; Left Bank Books, St. Louis, Missouri; the Missoula Museum of the Arts and the Yellowstone Art Center in Montana; and Gallery 401 at the Jewish Community Center in Providence, Rhode Island. *Dwelling of Remembrance: A Holocaust Memorial* was dedicated in 1989 at Scarsdale Synagogue, Scarsdale, New York. In 2010, he was included in *Seduced by the Sacred: Forging A Jewish Art* at the Mandell JCC in Hartford, Connecticut, and in 2012 in *West Meets East: A Cross Cultural Exhibition* at Jiangsu Chinese Art Academy, Nanjing, China.

Additionally, his installation/performance projects have been exhibited at the March Gallery in Richmond, Virginia (*The Day of the Dinosaur*); Charter Oak Cultural Center in Hartford, Connecticut (*Fragments of Dispersion*); the University of Maryland (*Journey Home*), and the Medalta Potteries National Historic Site in Alberta, Canada (*Where Have All the Children Gone?*).

Additional information on the artist may be found at <http://www.robertkatzsculptor.com>.

High Resolution images available upon request.

As a member of the American Alliance of Museums, Hebrew Home at Riverdale by RiverSpring Health is committed to publicly exhibiting its art collection throughout its 32-acre campus, including the Derfner Judaica Museum and a sculpture garden overlooking the Hudson River and Palisades. The Derfner Judaica Museum + The Art Collection provide educational and cultural programming for all visitors, including residents of the Hebrew Home, their families, and the general public, who come from throughout New York City, its surrounding suburbs, and elsewhere. RiverSpring Health is a nonprofit, non-sectarian geriatric organization serving more than 13,000 older adults through its resources and community service programs. Museum hours: Sunday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Art Collection and grounds open daily, 10:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Call 718 581.1596 for holiday hours or to schedule group tours, or for further information visit our website at <http://www.riverspringhealth.org/art>.



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